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ABSTRACT

This study of at-risk youth and children highlights the states' interest in this problem, sparked by changing demographies, new state educational reform policies, the concerns of business and industry, and increasing national awareness. The nature of at-risk youth is examined and the obstacles to meeting their needs are discussed. Findings are presented from surveys of the education agencies of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands; and of the directors of 69 programs identified as successful by the states and territories. Numerous strategies and program components are revealed in profiles of successful programs. Among the far-reaching recommended goals and activities are the following: (1) establish high quality educational programs for children from preschool to second grade; (2) provide a challenging curriculum; (3) provide alternative programs; (4) provide all students with skills training to promote employability; (5) assure an integrated school initiated community-home support system; (6) develop curricula and instructional techniques that will enhance diverse cultural understanding; (7) promote the need for staff who reflect the cultures of the students; (8) improve teacher pre-service and in-service training; (9) initiate appropriate data collection systems; (10) provide services for pregnant and parenting teenagers; and (11) develop public education campaigns about the consequences of being at risk. (VM)

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CHILDREN AT RISK: THE WORK OF THE STATES

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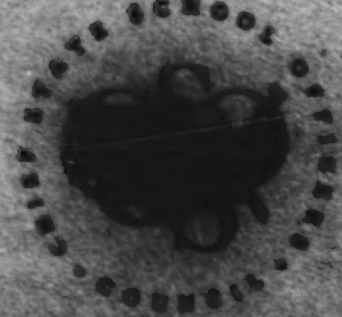

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CHILDREN AT RISK:
THE WORK OF THE STATES

COUNCIL of

CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nationwide non-profit organization of the 56 public officials who head departments of public education in every state, the District of Columbia, and five extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO seeks its members' consensus on major education issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, to federal agencies, to Congress, and to the public. Through its structure of standing and special committees, the Council responds to a broad range of concerns about education and provides leadership on major education issues.

Because the Council represents the chief education administrator in each state and territory, it has access to the educational and governmental establishment in each state, and the national influence that accompanies this unique position. CCSSO forms coalitions with many other education organizations and is able to provide leadership for a variety of policy concerns that affect elementary and secondary education. Thus, CCSSO members are able to act cooperatively on matters vital to the education of America's young people.

The Resource Center on Educational Equity provides services designed to achieve equity in education for minorities, women and girls, and for disabled, limited English proficient, and low-income students. The Center is responsible for managing and staffing a variety of CCSSO leadership initiatives to provide better educational services to children and youth at risk to school success.

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The findings and recommendations of this report were approved unanimously by the members of the Council of Chief State School Officers at the annual meeting in November 1987, in Asheville, North Carolina. This report was prepared for the Council of Chief State School Officers' Study Commission by Mr. Richard J. Coley and Dr. Margaret E. Goertz of the Educational Testing Service. Coley and Goertz were consultants to the Study Commission and worked closely with its Executive Board and CCSSO staff. They compiled state data, analyzed the responses from the state education agencies and prepared the final report. CCSSO acknowledges and is grateful for their significant contribution and hard work in the preparation of this report on educational services for students at risk.

The Council would also like to thank Gloria Frazier who worked as a consultant with the Study Commission Executive Board and designed the survey instrument which was distributed to the states. Special thanks go to Maryland Deputy State Superintendent of Schools Claud E. Kitchens and University of Maryland doctoral student Lawrence Leak who oversaw the essential tasks of collecting and cataloging the survey returns.

PREFACE

The CCSSO Study Commission has devoted 1987 to the study of at-risk children and youth. The Study Commission is the body of deputy chief state school officers. In order to develop an information base for analysis and preparation of recommendations to the Chief State School Officers, the Study Commission developed two surveys to elicit information about how the needs of at-risk students are being defined and met through changes in legislation, regulations or funding; the involvement of state departments of education and school districts with other agencies, organizations or businesses; the factors that are seen as obstacles to effectively serving at-risk students; and the design and operation of successful at-risk programs and practices. The first survey, the State Education Agency (SEA) Questionnaire, collected information from 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and the Virgin Islands. The second survey, the At-Risk Student Program Description, was completed by the directors of 69 programs identified by the states and territories as successful in serving the needs of at-risk youth.

This report presents the findings of these surveys. The Introduction describes the nature of the problem, obstacles to meeting the needs of at-risk students, and general strategies for effective programs. The second section presents a set of recommended goals and activities to be pursued by the Chief State School Officers. These recommendations emerged from the deliberations of the Study Commission at its annual meeting in September 1987. The third section summarizes current state activities on behalf of at-risk children and youth. The report concludes with examples of successful programs for at-risk children and youth.

INTRODUCTION

Changing demographics, new state education reform policies, the concerns of business and industry, and increasing national attention on the problem of at-risk youth have sparked an interest at the state level in dealing with the needs of at-risk children and youth. As one survey respondent wrote:

> *The problem demands immediate attention. These children are caught in systems that historically do not respond to their individual needs . . . This population is growing as poor teenagers and minority groups continue to have the highest birth rates and are under the most stress in society.*

The concerns of the state respondents are reflected in the writings of educational demographers and economists. The demographics of our educational system are driven by the changing demographics in the United States. Hodgkinson (1985) reports that one of every three Americans will be non-white by the year 2000. Fifty-nine percent of the children who turn 18 by that year will have lived in a single-parent household. Twenty-two percent of all children lived in poverty in 1983, up from 16 percent in 1979. A child under six is *six times* more likely to be poor than a person over 65. Increasingly, children are giving birth to children, babies who are more likely to be premature, underweight and born with developmental problems.

These trends mean that more children are entering school from poverty households, from single-parent households (rural and urban), from minority backgrounds and with learning disabilities. These are groups of children with whom schools historically have often not succeeded. Levin (1985) estimates that at least 30 percent of today's schoolchildren are educationally disadvantaged. He argues that ignoring the educational needs of these students will lead to a deterioration in the quality of the nation's labor force, a loss of tax revenues from productive workers, rising costs for public assistance, and to the specter of a dual society — one composed primarily of well-educated, prosperous non-minorities and one composed mainly of poorly educated, unemployed or underemployed, low-paid minorities.

The survey respondents wrote that meeting the needs of at-risk children is a formidable task. State and local school districts face a series of economic, structural, attitudinal and other obstacles to effectively serving this population. The primary obstacle is fiscal. The decreasing federal role in education, the poor condition of many state and local economies, and a lack of state legislative commitment and leadership to find resources for at-risk programs make new funds for at-risk student programs difficult to obtain.

Even when federal and state aid is available, the categorical nature of many funding programs for at-risk students limits the flexibility of local school districts in providing a continuum of services to students. In the words of a survey respondent,

> *Often the problem is more pervasive than dealing with the symptoms (low achievement, drug abuse), but the funding source limits the ability to address the underlying problem or to address similar problems.*

The pullout service model used in many categorical programs may also be detrimental to the at-risk student. Unless well-coordinated across all teachers, pullout programs tend to fragment the basic instructional program for students participating in them.

The difficulty of developing alternative education programs and a lack of coordination and cooperation among service providers also serve as major structural barriers to meeting the needs of at-risk students. Some students have trouble adapting to the social structure and academic requirements of a traditional four-year comprehensive high school and find a lack of personal identity and lack of meaningful involvement in this setting. Yet, schools as organizations are not equipped to offer alternative programs or nontraditional services, such as child care and family counseling. State and local rules and procedures, community attitudes about the role of the school in providing non-traditional services and a lack of interagency coordination and collaboration often mitigate against the development of relevant programs or options.

These problems are confounded by negative attitudes about at-risk students themselves, attitudes that include a "blaming the victim" mentality, the perception that not all children can learn and the feeling that school is not the place for a substantial number of children. The unwillingness of local districts to take responsibility for this population and a lack of priority for at-risk learners, particularly at the federal level, are causes for concern, as well.

Another obstacle to the development of programs for at-risk students is the need for better information on

the characteristics of effective programs and on the demographic characteristics of the at-risk student population. States desire information on criteria for defining the "at-risk" population; ways to identify, disseminate and fund effective programs; and means of developing program collaboration and coordination. A majority of the states expressed a need for new or additional data on dropouts, special program participants, student and family characteristics, and demographic trends. In addition, they would like better coordination of data collection among state agencies and more uniformity and consistency of definitions and data formats.

The states identified four general elements of effective strategies for meeting the needs of at-risk children and youth: (1) collaboration and coordination; (2) staff and parent involvement in the planning and implementation of programs for at-risk students; (3) emphasis on prevention and early intervention; and (4) opportunities for non-traditional education experiences. Any effective strategy will require a team effort that involves all relevant state agencies, business and industry, communities, schools, and parents. Programs that operate at the building level and involve all of the school's staff and parents in planning and implementation are considered the most likely to succeed. More program emphasis should be placed on prevention and early intervention and these efforts should be generic, rather than focussing on a single risk such as substance abuse. Finally, non-traditional educational arrangements should be encouraged. School structures need to be changed to accommodate the growing diversity of students.

These strategies are reflected in a wide range of state and local activities in support of at-risk children and youth. A sample of these activities are described in the last two sections of this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

States recognize the the complexity of the at-risk student problem requires multi-faceted solutions, not a "quick fix." States have taken steps to study the problem, to develop mechanisms for coordinated planning, to implement categorical programs and to support local school district initiatives. Policymakers face two major tasks, however, as they continue to address the needs of at-risk students: building a consensus among educators, legislators and community and business leaders for mandating and funding state programs for at-risk youth, and overcoming resistance to change at the state and local levels. Meeting the needs of at-risk students will require time, commitment and considerable resources from federal, state and local governments.

The goal is clear. We believe our students have the capacity to learn and our education system has the capacity to teach so that the objective for Year 2000 for high school graduation for virtually all students can be attained. To accomplish this objective will require substantial changes in education policy and in school practice now.

To this end, the CCSSO Study Commission recommends that the Chief State School Officers pursue the following goals:

- Leadership in the education of the public about the human loss and economic consequences of failing to meet the needs of at-risk children and youth.
- Pursuit of sufficient financial resources to meet the educational needs of at-risk children and youth.
- Elimination of constraints to the provision of appropriate and effective educational services for at-risk children and youth.
- Identification of the characteristics of effective educational programs and practices for at-risk students.
- Establishment of high quality and developmentally appropriate early childhood programs and curricula from preschool through second grade as a minimum.
- Entitlement of each at-risk student to access to a curriculum that is challenging and includes a common core of knowledge for all students.
- Provision of alternative education programs for at-risk youth for whom traditional educational approaches have proven unsuccessful (e.g., smaller classes, extra vocational training, literacy training for youth offenders with rewards for participation of reduced sentences).
- Assurance that students have experiences which lead to employability skills.
- Assurance of an integrated school-initiated, community-home support system for at-risk students.
- Development of curricula and instructional techniques which enhance diverse cultural understanding.
- Promotion of the need for and value of staff who reflect the cultures of all students.
- Improvement of teacher pre-service and in-service training to prepare teachers to work with at-risk students.
- Initiation of data collection systems which enable school officials to identify appropriate program and individual needs.

These goals should be pursued by the Chief State School Officers through the following recommended activities.

1. Undertake a public education campaign about the economic consequences of failure to address the educational challenges of at-risk students. Specially tailor arguments for political leaders.
2. Define at-risk students as those students who are not likely to complete high school successfully.
3. Target for services pregnant teenagers, teenage parents and their children.
4. Work to get teachers to increase their expectations for at-risk students.
5. Avoid stigmatizing and labeling at-risk children and their families.
6. Provide for effective involvement and training for the parents of at-risk students.
7. Promote for each at-risk student the opportunity to attend a school in which adult advocates give continuous oversight and direction to their students' well-being and educational development/progress.
8. Establish early child development programs for three and four year-olds. Provide program options for younger children.
9. Provide support and programs for all students at transitional periods in their educational sequences (e.g., elementary to junior high school, junior high school to senior high school).
10. Provide supplementary instructional programs for at-risk students (e.g., summer school, extended school day).

11. Encourage school-based work programs for at-risk students. Relate jobs to students' academic program.
12. Insure adequate guidance services support for at-risk students.
13. Use programs such as community education programs to play a key role in attracting dropouts back to school.
14. Support scholarship and other incentive programs to increase the pool of culturally diverse teachers.
15. Identify and remove barriers to effective education for at-risk students created by federal and state programmatic and fiscal requirements.
16. Strengthen regular classroom services by altering or eliminating "pull-out" programs (e.g., consider using categorical program teachers in classrooms as resource coaches to assist regular teachers in working with at-risk students).
17. Provide necessary additional resources, particularly for new programs (e.g., early child development), after first considering the most effective use of existing resources to meet the needs of at-risk students.
18. Fund research to identify effective education programs for at-risk students, especially with regard to developing teacher training techniques to meet the diversity of student learning styles.
19. Provide financial and technical assistance support for demonstration projects on promising programs for at-risk students based on research findings (e.g., instructional arrangements, age for school entrance, flexible scheduling, alternative schools or programs).
20. Adjust school finance formulas to provide *additional* funds for districts with high concentrations of at-risk students.
21. Encourage governors to establish cabinet-level interagency cooperative agreements among agencies providing services to at-risk students and their families. Similar interagency cooperative agreements should be established at the local level and include private, non-profit agency service providers.
22. Establish school-based collaborative arrangements with neighborhood health and social service providers.
23. Establish partnerships with business and industry to provide effective school-to-work transitions for at-risk students.
24. Monitor programs for at-risk students regularly and provide full reports to the public, especially about unanticipated results (e.g., initial decline in achievement test scores because of increased retention of at-risk students).
25. Provide education information about students, schools, school districts, and the states to enable identification of students at risk and to report on school conditions and performance. The information must be sufficient to let one know whether program goals are being met and to provide a basis for local and state policies to improve student and school performance.

STATE ACTIVITIES ON BEHALF OF AT-RISK CHILDREN AND YOUTH

States have already begun to take steps to identify and serve at-risk children and youth. This section provides an overview of (1) the range of definitions that states report using to define at-risk students, (2) state legislation and programs that address both the total at-risk student population and subgroups of students considered to be at-risk, (3) the extent and nature of cross-agency cooperation and collaboration and (4) state funding of at-risk programs.

How States Define Their At-Risk Target Populations

Thirty-nine state education agencies (SEAs) reported the existence of a working definition(s) of "at-risk student" in their states. The definitions used by the SEAs fall into one or more of the following four categories: students with low achievement levels; students with behavioral problems; students at risk of dropping out of school; and/or students exhibiting one or more at-risk indicators (e.g., low academic performance, poor attendance, behavioral problems, personal economic conditions). In addition, definitions of at-risk students can vary within a state, either across state agencies and programs or across local school districts.

Three states use, or plan to use, academic progress as the primary criterion for defining at-risk students. Hawaii and Missouri define children or youth at-risk if they consistently fail to make satisfactory progress in school. Proposed legislation in North Carolina uses more specific criteria: scoring below the 50th percentile on a standardized system-wide test, falling one or more years behind in grade level achievement, or displaying evidence of behavior patterns that, if not corrected, are likely to result in academic achievement or psychological adaptation below a level that could reasonably be expected for the student.

Only one state, North Dakota, focuses specifically on students' behavioral problems. Their definition, which grew out of hearings by a governor's commission on at-risk children and adolescents, includes students who are abused and neglected, suicidal, emotionally and behaviorally disturbed, chemically dependent and abusing, delinquents and the dependents of alcoholics.

Eleven states define their target population as students who are at risk of dropping out of school prior to graduation, generally for reasons of low academic achievement, environmental factors (such as family poverty, limited proficiency in English, handicapping conditions) and other student behaviors or conditions (e.g., pregnancy, tardiness, substance abuse and/or lack of involvement in school activities).

Another nine states reported a somewhat broader definition of at-risk students. These states do not restrict at-risk students to those who have the potential to drop out of school, but their definitions do include most of the criteria discussed in the preceding paragraph. For example, Virginia's draft definition of children educationally at-risk includes those "who may not succeed in school or may not successfully make the transition from school to productive lives." Conditions that place children educationally at-risk include family conditions (poverty, cultural/linguistic differences, migrancy), academic failure, low self-esteem, negative student behaviors (truancy; disruptive, suicidal, runaway or criminal behaviors; substance abuse), pregnancy and dropping out of school. Ohio's definition adds inadequate readiness skills/developmental delay and inappropriate school placement, instruction and/or school curriculum to the list of contributing factors and includes individuals from birth through 21 years of age in its coverage. New Jersey uses the concept of a continuum to identify students who require differing kinds of school responses, levels of effort, and intensities of intervention. The continuum encompasses student needs ranging from "those all students experience as they strive to meet personal, family and community standards to the profound needs which, if unmet, lead to dropping out."

Thirteen states reported that the definition of at-risk students varies by units and/or program category within the state. In Utah, for example, students are defined "consistent with agency or department responsibilities." Vermont noted that the definition of at-risk is made in the context of the program and service needed. Mississippi indicated that the definition differs across programs since the ability to serve most special populations rests on federal funding.

In two states, Colorado and Maine, definitions of at-risk students are developed at the local level. In Colorado, local districts have developed definitions that look at variables like academic performance, attendance, parent education level and grade retention. Maine requires school districts to identify and address the needs of at-risk students in their school improvement plans. Checklists that may be used include factors such as low self-esteem, truancy, poor academic performance, discipline actions and personal problems.

State Education Legislation and Programs for At-Risk Youth

Thirty states reported having legislation or programs that are designed to meet the needs of at least some subgroup of the at-risk student population. Five states described legislation that addresses more than one aspect of the at-risk student population. For example, California's SB 65 provides for the establishment of publicly or privately operated nonsectarian educational clinics to provide educational and employment related services to high school dropouts. It also created school-based coordinated pupil motivation and maintenance programs to keep pupils in school. Schools that participate in this program are given greater flexibility in the use of categorical aid for programs such as school improvement, compensatory education, bilingual education/ESL, and gifted and talented. By waiving regulations for the use of these funds, the state hopes to encourage districts to develop comprehensive long-range plans to meet the needs of all at-risk students.

Colorado, Georgia and Illinois addressed the at-risk issue in education reform legislation that focuses on such issues as pre-kindergarten, full day kindergarten, truant and dropout prevention, alternative education programs, support and dissemination of promising pilot programs, and early childhood screening. For example, Illinois provides grants to local education agencies (LEAs) to conduct screening programs to identify children ages 3-5 who are at risk of academic failure and to provide appropriate educational programs for those children to increase the likelihood of school success. The Georgia State Board of Education designates LEAs as demonstration school systems to improve educational programs. Several of these sites provide models for programs to serve at-risk students.

Rhode Island's "Literacy and Dropout Prevention Act of 1987" includes early screening, K-12 remediation and dropout prevention. Local school districts will be required to focus K-3 instruction on literacy for all students, and to provide supplementary literacy instruction at four levels of intervention: intensive development in grades K-3; early intervention in grades 4-6; remediation in grades 7-8; and intensive remediation in grades 9-12.

Twenty-two states and territories described specific legislation or programs designed to meet the needs of at least one group of at-risk students. Connecticut, Kentucky, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania provide grants to LEAs to develop and implement dropout prevention programs. In Massachusetts, the local school districts must form local dropout prevention advisory councils to assist in program development and implementation. Florida's dropout prevention program includes retrieval activities that identify and motivate dropouts to reenter school and earn a diploma; education alternatives for students who are unsuccessful or disinterested; substance abuse programs; and community-based programs provided by nonprofit agencies to supplement LEA dropout prevention programs.

New York's program of Attendance Improvement/ Dropout Prevention Aid focuses on LEAs where attendance falls below a certain standard. Districts must submit corrective plans to the SEA that include methods of identifying at-risk students in the eighth grade and specific actions to increase attendance and retention rates. In Texas, HB 1010, Dropout Prevention Program, requires the central education agency to develop a program that includes standardized statewide record keeping, documentation of school transfers by students, and follow-up procedures for dropouts. The goal is to reduce the statewide longitudinal dropout rate to not more than five percent of the total school population.

A number of the states reported the existence of programs designed to meet the needs of other at-risk subpopulations. Basic skills, remediation and reading programs were cited in Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Washington. Pre-kindergarten and/or early childhood education programs were reported in New York, Oklahoma, and Washington. Programs for students with limited English proficiency were cited in Hawaii. Pregnancy, parenting, and/or day care initiatives were reported in Delaware, Hawaii, Pennsylvania, and Washington. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington cited substance abuse programs; suicide prevention programs were reported in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Three states have developed strategies that require local school districts to address the at-risk student population. All local school districts in Maine must identify and address the needs of at-risk students in grades K-12 as part of their school improvement plans. Wisconsin adopted a similar requirement in 1985. North Carolina's draft legislation would require districts to develop and implement individualized plans for providing services to students identified as at-risk. Local plans would include provisions related to prevention and early intervention, curriculum modification, counseling and other support services, attendance improvement, parental involvement and the establishment of a Local Council for Students-at-Risk.

State Categorical Programs

Long before the term "at risk" came into use, special populations of students were the focus of specific state education initiatives. About three-quarters of the states and territories reported the existence of categorical programs designed to meet the needs of at-risk subpopulations (Table 1). Aside from early childhood programs and programs for incarcerated youth, only half or fewer or the states responding report the existence of legislation in these areas.

Table 1

	Legislation	Regulations	Programs
Compensatory Education	24	27	37
Bilingual/ESL Education	20	27	39
Early Childhood Education	30	28	40
Preschool Education	27	27	38
Education & Support Services for Pregnant Teenagers	14	19	40
Education for Incarcerated Youth	28	32	43
Education for Dropouts	19	21	38
Dropout Prevention	18	19	37
Substance Abuse	25	23	43

The questionnaire did not collect information on the nature of these laws, regulations and policies or on the level and source of funding. Therefore, we do not know the extent of the operation of the programs within a state or whether state laws mandate the provision of these services to eligible students or merely permit districts to operate programs at their discretion.

Cross-agency Cooperation and Collaboration

Cross-agency cooperation and collaboration is of great concern at the state level and states are taking action to increase coordination across state agencies and to require coordination and/or collaboration at the local school district level.

Four states provided details on formalized cross-agency planning activities at the state level. The North Dakota legislature recently established a children's services coordinating committee to develop a plan for a coordinated delivery of services to children and adolescents. Their major responsibility is the development of a plan that will include definitions and criteria for identification of at-risk children, a description of governmental services authorized for children and adolescents, and recommendations for new mechanisms to improve coordination of public and private services for this group. In 1986, the Maryland legislature required that the Maryland State Departments of Education, Human Resources and Health and Mental Hygiene collaboratively report on the unmet special needs of children and plan for services to meet these needs. The resulting "Interagency Plan for Children with Special Needs" sets priorities for developing or expanding services needed by special needs children and their families; increases inter-agency coordination in planning, financing, case management, and administration of services; and establishes an agenda for action.

Arkansas is currently developing an "Arkansas Youth At Risk State Plan" that will incorporate Project SPARK (Services Provided for At Risk Kids), a project that included the creation of a Governor's Task Force on Youth at Risk and the development of cooperative efforts to boost business and community involvement in structuring programs for at-risk youth. Ohio's "Formula for Education Success" promotes SEA interdivisional coordination in developing materials and facilitating conferences and in the provision of technical assistance to local school districts as they develop their own plans for at-risk students.

Several states reported requirements for coordination or collaboration at the local school district level. Legislation relating to community-based dropout prevention programs in Florida, for example, requires coordination between LEAs and community agencies. Similarly, Wisconsin's at-risk legislation requires LEAs and communities to work collaboratively and a number of new state school district standards specify required cooperative agreements to meet pupil needs. Both Georgia and Massachusetts require the documentation of community involvement as a condition for receiving certain program grant funds. In Massachusetts these local advisory councils, composed of representatives of various community organizations, participate in proposal and program development and in implementation activities.

School and business partnerships have also contributed to successful at-risk programs. Business generally sponsors a particular activity like basic skills training, career or job training, attendance incentive contributions, or job provision. The Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) was also cited as an example of a partnership for

at-risk students. In the state of Washington, 70 LEAs, working with their private industry councils (PICs), have joint training programs that focus on keeping students in school. Similarly, in West Virginia, the SEA has worked with the state PICs to use JTPA funds to work with potential dropouts.

State Funding of At-Risk Programs

Twenty-four states and territories reported new funding programs in support of at-risk students. By and large, new funding programs are small, are categorical in nature and provide financial support for the types of initiatives described in the section on at-risk legislation and programs, particularly dropout prevention and early childhood education programs.

Most of the new funding programs discussed by the states draw on state funds. A few states reported using federal funds (Drug Free Schools, JTPA, vocational education set-asides, compensatory education) to address the needs of at-risk students, while others noted that state health and community affairs departments provide funds targeted to at-risk youth.

The states also use different methods of allocating new funds for at-risk students to local school districts. Some states provide funds to a limited number of districts using competitive grants. In other states, all districts are eligible to receive funds, but in the form of grants. Florida's Dropout Prevention Program funds are distributed to districts using a pupil weighting of 1.67 in the general operating aid formula. Indiana, Illinois and New York are examples of states that take student, school and/or district characteristics into account when allocating funds for some of their at-risk student programs. New York targets its Attendance Improvement/ Dropout Prevention Aid on districts with low attendance rates. New legislation in Indiana will disburse aid to districts based on the percentage of families in poverty, single parent households and households headed by non-high school graduates. Thirty percent of the funds for Illinois' Reading Improvement Program are distributed based on the number of disadvantaged pupils in each school district.

Fourteen states changed funding approaches or were considering new strategies for acquiring and distributing funds for at-risk students. One reported change is the search for alternative or nontraditional funding sources to address the problems of at-risk students, along with more collaboration and pooling of resources. A significant change noted in one state was the cooperative venture of four state agencies pooling federal funds to deal with chemical abuse through a mini-grant program to schools. Another SEA is exploring federal and private sources of additional funding for at-risk students and is preparing a proposal for funding from the National Centers for Disease Control for AIDS prevention.

Several SEAs are examining or implementing changes to their state aid formulas to recognize the needs of at-risk students. Such changes include revising the way that pupils are counted for state aid purposes; assigning at-risk students weightings within the school aid formula that reflect actual program costs; equalizing optional local funding so that poorer LEAs can raise additional dollars; modifying existing formula adjustments, such as a poverty factor; distributing a portion of state aid based on the number or percentage of dropouts; and increasing funding for school counselors and other school-level support services to work with at-risk students.

States are concerned, however, that the level of priority given to at-risk students and issues is insufficient to trigger significant resources, particularly in state legislatures. This low level of priority is driven by a number of factors: a lack of knowledge about the critical importance of the mission of the school in reducing the number of at-risk students; the attitude, among some, that new money is not necessary; the question of why general school aid is not sufficient; the fairness of new dollars being targeted to cities, communities with large concentrations of at-risk students; and a questioning of whether the outcomes of new programs will justify expenditures. At-risk students must also compete with better entrenched interests for services, such as the "general" school population,as well as the foci of recent education reform activity, including statewide assessment programs, career ladder programs for teachers, and teacher testing. Items such as remediation programs, in-school suspension programs, and special instructional programs are often phased in as funds become available.

Summary

The survey of the states produced evidence that the states are becoming increasingly active in identifying and serving at-risk students. While there is much diversity in how states choose to define at-risk students, most of the states have developed working definitions to guide them in developing legislation and programs. State legislative and program approaches include those targeted at the total at-risk population, those focused on the needs of specific sub-groups of this population, those delegating program responsibilities to LEAs, and those requiring some form of cross-agency collaboration or coordination at the state level. In addition, states have sup-

ported categorical programs to meet the needs of special students. Many of the SEAs report new funding programs for at-risk students. By and large, these new programs are small, categorical in nature, and focus on dropout prevention and early childhood education.

EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

As part of the CCSSO Study Commission's survey, each state was asked to identify three successful programs serving the needs of at-risk students that have been operating for at least two years. Completed questionnaires were received from 69 programs. Thirty programs focused on dropouts or potential dropouts at the high school level; 19 focused on dropout prevention at the pre-high school level; 14 were geared for children at the preschool and elementary level; 10 focused on pregnancy, drug abuse or "wellness"; and three were federal or state categorical programs. (Since some programs served more than one group, some programs are counted more than once.) Within each type of program focus, a variety of program approaches were reported. The programs described below are illustrative of the approaches found in each category.

Programs for High School Dropouts or Potential Dropouts

Programs that were designed to serve high school dropouts or potential dropouts included alternative high schools, programs involving the business community, extended day programs, mainstream high school programs, and statewide programs.

The District of Columbia's Spingarn STAY High School is an alternative school that is mandated by the Board of Education and serves students who enroll voluntarily or who are referred by the schools or the courts. DC's Washington-Dix Street Academy is made up of three 14-week sessions. A full-time student who enters with ninth grade credits can earn a diploma in two and a half years.

Examples of programs that involve the business community were reported by California and South Dakota. California's Partnership Academies (nine LEAs) are designed to provide potential dropouts with motivation for success by using a school-within-a-school structure to provide a home base of support and use a school/business partnership to provide technical training. Students enter the program in the tenth grade and take academic classes plus technical lab classes. The program also provides a company mentor, part-time work, and summer employment. Students are identified by counselors and teachers during the ninth grade. South Dakota's School Transition to Employment Partnership (STEP) operates through the existing structure of education, job training (JTPA), and job placement (Job Service) and includes instruction in three distinct course areas of employability (independent living and decision making skills, career development and pre-employment and job seeking skills, and job keeping and work responsibility skills). The program serves students who are dropouts, handicapped, economically disadvantaged, adjudicated delinquent, academically disadvantaged, and those facing barriers to employment.

An extended day program was reported in Raleigh (North Carolina) that serves dropouts and potential dropouts. This program is an extension of the conventional program and provides students with the opportunity to earn a diploma. Students are identified through school recruitment efforts and through a school and community referral system. Hours of program operation vary from 10:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.; staffing may consist of regular day teachers, community volunteers, or retired teachers.

An example of a mainstream approach is the Fargo (North Dakota) South High School Individualized Learning Center (ILC). The ILC is a remedial/helping program designed to assist high school students who are having academic difficulties. Not eligible for traditional special services, these students may fall "between the cracks" and drop out of school. The students participate in the ILC during their free school periods; the ILC is not substituted for regular classroom instruction.

Two types of statewide programs were reported. Massachusetts's Chapter 188 Dropout Prevention Grant Program awards funds on a competitive basis to LEAs to develop and implement programs that better address the needs of students at risk of dropping out. State funding is restricted to programs serving students in grades 7-12, and priority is given to LEAs with high concentrations of students from low income families. A prerequisite for funding is the formation of a local dropout prevention advisory council to assist in program development and implementation. The council must include representatives of students, administrators, teachers, parents, institutions of higher education, community agencies, and labor.

School-Community Guidance Centers, administered by the Texas SEA, provide a variety of services

designed to reduce the factors that contribute to truancy, academic failure, dropping out, and delinquency. The basic core of services includes instruction, counseling, home/school liaison, and follow-up. Each center has also developed a system of coordinating services with other agencies. State money for the centers is awarded competitively.

Dropout Prevention at the Pre-High School Level

A wide variety of activities was reported under this heading, including academic programs, programs of guidance and support, in-school suspension programs, and Cities-in-Schools programs.

The Appalachian Dropout Program, operating in the Attalla (Alabama) City School System, identifies potential dropouts in the fourth and fifth grades based on below grade level performance, absenteeism, low achievement scores, and low grades. When students reach the sixth grade they receive remediation, counseling, and vocational classes after school. The program runs through the sixth grade. Similarly, the Bradley County (Tennessee) Scholastic Study Skills Program is designed to identify the at-risk student and provide early intervention. The program thrust is three-fold. First, the student is enrolled in an eight-week study skills lab. Second, the student participates in eight group and individual counseling sessions to address self-worth and attitudes about the school and community, and to establish goals. Third, the students' parents participate in eight weekly sessions of parent effectiveness training.

TRY (Teaching the Real You) Program in the Taylor County (West Virginia) Schools is a special motivational program for students who are unable to cope with the regular school curriculum and/or traditional classroom setting. The program serves students with behavior problems and potential dropouts for half the day in an alternative setting and half the day in the regular middle school setting. The program is a step between the regular school and the alternative school; its goal is to return the student to the regular mainstream program. The Cancryn Alternative Program in the Virgin Islands is another middle school alternative program. Students referred to the program may exhibit underachievement, acting out behavior, withdrawn behavior, high absenteeism or tardiness, authority problems, home problems, poor self-image or lack of motivation. The program seeks to provide a more appropriate atmosphere for these students by creating a sense of belonging, individualizing instruction, decreasing staff ratios, and providing experiential learning activities.

An example of a support program was provided by the AuSable Valley Central School District (Clintonville, New York). Improving Student Attendance and Achievement through Intervention of a Student Support/Home-School Liaison Committee is an improved system of guidance and pupil personnel support for target students and their parents. The program places heavy emphasis on personal counseling, home visitation, and open communication. Students are selected for the program on the basis of attendance records and staff recommendations. North Carolina provided a description of the statewide In-School Suspension Program. This program is designed for those students who need to be provided opportunities to develop the degree of self-discipline required to take advantage of the school's academic programs.

Philadelphia's adaptation of the national Cities-in-Schools (CIS) program is a coordinated school, city department, and community-based human service delivery system designed to meet the needs of students identified as at risk of dropping out. The model includes the formation of a Board of Directors composed of key city decision-makers, the school superintendent, a representative of the corporate sector, the department of justice, an institution of higher education, and department of recreation. This board files for non-profit status and provides the leadership and secures the funds necessary to achieve the goal of harnessing the city's services to better serve elementary, middle, and high school youth. Each city puts its own stamp on the program. The program provides instruction, support services and motivational activities, career exploration and employment activities, and contact with the home.

Preschool and Elementary Programs

Program descriptions included preschool and elementary at-risk programs that operate at the state and local levels. State programs included Louisiana's Four Year Old At-Risk Program, Maryland's Extended Elementary Education Program, and Oregon's Child Development Specialist Program. Louisiana's program is developmental in nature and is based upon child-initiated activities. Students are identified using Head Start waiting lists, siblings of Chapter 1 students, children from low income families, and siblings of former program participants. Students are screened for participation; those who exhibit the greatest development lags are selected for the program.

Maryland's program for four year olds is provided in "at risk" schools. Schools with third grade reading comprehension scores at least six months below national norms are eligible. Any child residing in the school's attendance area may participate on a first-come, first-served basis. Program curriculum focuses on language and concept development and includes cross-grade staff communication and home-school cooperation activities. Oregon's Child Development Specialist Program places emphasis on K-5 programs. Child development specialists, focusing on developmental student needs, are to reduce the incidence of learning problems that normally appear at the upper grades. The process emphasizes the development of a positive self-concept, skills in human relations and acceptance of responsibility as a prerequisite for academic learning.

Several examples of local early childhood programs for at-risk students were provided. Montclair's (New Jersey) Cognitive Linguistic Intervention Program is designed to identify and provide services to at-risk preschool and kindergarten children who exhibit difficulties in cognitive or linguistic development. All services are delivered within the context of the regular classroom using a transdisciplinary approach. The Columbus (Ohio) Public Schools Reading Recovery program is a 30-minute one-to-one intervention program for the poorest readers in first grade classrooms. The program's goals are to reduce reading failure through early intervention and to help children become independent readers. The program supplements, but does not replace, regular teaching.

Project STAY (School to Aid Youth) operating in Moore, Oklahoma, is an early intervention dropout prevention program that identifies and addresses the social, emotional, and academic needs of first grade students. Referred and screened students remain in the program through the year, spending half the day in their regular classroom and half the day in the project. The program provides individual instruction in reading and math and students are helped to improve their self-concept and sense of worth. After the program, students are returned full-time to the regular classroom.

Finally, Williamsburg, Virginia's Bright Beginnings program is a collaborative effort between the schools and the Colonial Services Board. The program serves about 60 at-risk children, birth to age 5, and their families. Services include classroom instruction, home visits, and sharing centers. Parent involvement is stressed through participation in program activities and through the program's Advisory Board.

Family Life Programs

Of the ten program descriptions provided by respondents that fall into this category, all but two focused on pregnant students or dropouts; one focused on student "wellness" and one on drug abuse. The Gettysburg (Pennsylvania) Adolescent Parenting Program (GAPP), for example, provides pregnant students with the support, education, and assistance necessary to allow them to complete their education. The program includes formal course work, infant and toddler laboratories, social work, career and personal counseling, day care, and health care services. Delaware's Wellness Program, a statewide program, is a K-6 package of curriculum materials emphasizing self-concept, physical fitness, interpersonal relationships, coping skills, etc. Birmingham, Alabama's Community-Based Drug Prevention Program provides drug education and an in-house drug education counselor at the high school.

Summary

Sixty-nine examples of successful at-risk programs were submitted by the states. The large majority of the programs focused on dropout prevention, at either the high school or pre-high school level, and early childhood education. A variety of program approaches exists within each type of program focus. For example, high school dropout prevention programs include alternative high schools or programs within schools, extended day programs, and programs involving the business community. Dropout prevention programs at the pre-high school level included academic programs, programs of guidance and support, and in-school suspension programs.

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